

Green meetings, conferences save energy, resources and money

COLUMBIA, SC – Have you ever considered the amount of resources your company puts into holding meetings? Whether it's a half-day sales training for a dozen people to a multi-day conference for hundreds of attendees, there are some quick and easy steps your business can take to reduce costs and waste.

- **Buy into the concept.** The person or committee responsible for planning your meeting needs to develop a strategy from the beginning that looks at more efficient use of materials, creates less waste and ultimately saves money. Putting the plan in writing will help keep the team's focus on watching resources and reducing waste.
- **Save some trees.** Event planners can use electronic communications as effectively as printing and mailing paper invitations. Developing a designated page on the company Web site that can be updated periodically with meeting information is an inexpensive way to communicate. And using simple e-mail reminders can help alert people to check your site. You might even consider offering on-line registration for your meeting as another cost-saving idea.

Another tip for cutting down on paper waste is asking presenters not to make copies of their PowerPoint presentations but rather to offer to e-mail those slides to people who request them. If you do have to make copies or handouts, be sure to use both sides of the paper for a 50 percent savings.

- **Location, location, location.** Hold meetings in areas in close proximity to the greatest number of potential attendees. This helps cut down on travel costs as well as reduces air emissions from planes, trains and



automobiles. If you're planning a multi-day event, choose a venue that has plenty of amenities within walking distance or near public transportation.

- **Recycling bins abound.** Make sure to place prominently labeled collection bins for any materials that may be generated as a part of your meeting. If you're serving bottled water or sodas in aluminum cans, have a container for plastic and aluminum. Depending on your market, you may be able to co-mingle those into one collection bin. Paper and newsprint also are available at meetings and recycling them makes good sense, too.
- **Food and beverage service, please.** Ask your caterer to reduce waste by using linens, china and silverware instead of disposable napkins, plates and utensils. If you're having a buffet, ask them to provide salt, pepper, cream, sugar, ketchup and other condiments in bulk containers. Avoid bulky box lunches in favor of deli trays or salad bars. You may also want to consider providing reusable drinking cups or coffee mugs to cut waste.

ROLE REVERSAL: If you're attending a green meeting or conference, look for and take advantage of all opportunities to do the "green" thing. A green meeting also depends on cooperative attendees.

- **Hotel accommodations.** See if your hotel provides a green linen service that offers you the option to reuse towels and keep your same sheets during the course of your stay to reduce laundering costs and water usage.
- **Closing the loop.** Make sure you purchase supplies for your meetings that are made from recycled content. Anything from three-ring binders, presentation folders, copy paper, pens and pencils can be made from recovered materials and their quality and performance match, if not rival, their virgin-material counterparts. Besides, if you're going to collect these materials, you ought to be buying the next generation of these items.
- **Energy conservation.** Make sure to coordinate with the building maintenance team to have lights automatically cut off in rooms not being used and to monitor heating and cooling levels for maximum comfort and energy savings.
- **Share the news.** Let your meeting attendees know of the efforts you've used to help reduce waste and save money. It will help them to know up-front what's expected of them and who knows, the money you save may benefit them in some way. Can you say company barbecue?



Green Meeting Tips:

- If you're at a meeting that isn't green, approach the host or organizers and politely express your preference to attend green meetings.
- Be proactive. Promote the concept of green meetings within your company whether a meeting is being planned or not. Try to get a commitment that future meeting will be green.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also offers information on green meetings on its Web site, www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings.



Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

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Editor: Karen Owens; **Assistant Editor:** Richard Chesley; and **Layout/Design:** Gregg Glymph.